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Can nuclear weapons be 'frozen?'

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The Federation of American Scientists began a two-day meeting Tuesday to tackle the question of whether the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race can be realistically 'frozen.'

But its task will not be easy.

Carl Duckett, former CIA deputy director for science and technology, said one problem "is that experts tend to make an issue very complex."

"As to the definition of 'freeze,' that is the most important question of all," he said. "I found in SALT I we had countless meetings to define simply what is a bomber -- a Piper Cub with a hand grenade? A B-52?'

The federation itself took no position on the issue that has sparked large European demonstrations favoring a freeze at current levels, and is winning growing popular support in the United States and its Congress.

Opponents condemn the idea on grounds that, even if verifiable, a freeze would halt production or deployment of new U.S. nuclear weapons at a time when the Soviets are said to have a preponderance of power.

The federation selected a panel of six experts and four witnesses including three from outside government plus Robert Dean, deputy director of the State Department's Office of Politico-Military Affairs.

The panel includes: Chairman Alton Frye, Washington representative of the Council on Foreign Relations; Duckett; Adrian Fisher, former deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and former dean of the Georgetown University School of Law; Frank von Hippel, senior physicist of the Center for Energy and Environmental Studies in Princeton University and chairman of the Federation of American Scientists, and Dimitri Simes, Soviet-born political scientist and director of Johns Hopkins University Foreign Policy Institute's Soviet and East European Research Program.

Jeremy Stone, federation director, said, "The widespread public interest in a nuclear weapons freeze obliges the community of arms control, foreign policy and military analysis to give far more attention to this possibility than they have done before."

The underlying question he said, is: "To what extent can the arms race be frozen?"